

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE

THE HONORABLE THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS AND THE
MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KING'S COLLEGE,

IN WINDSOR, NOVA SCOTIA,

ON THE 29th JUNE, A. D. 1855.

BY

THE REVEREND GEORGE W. HILL, M.A.

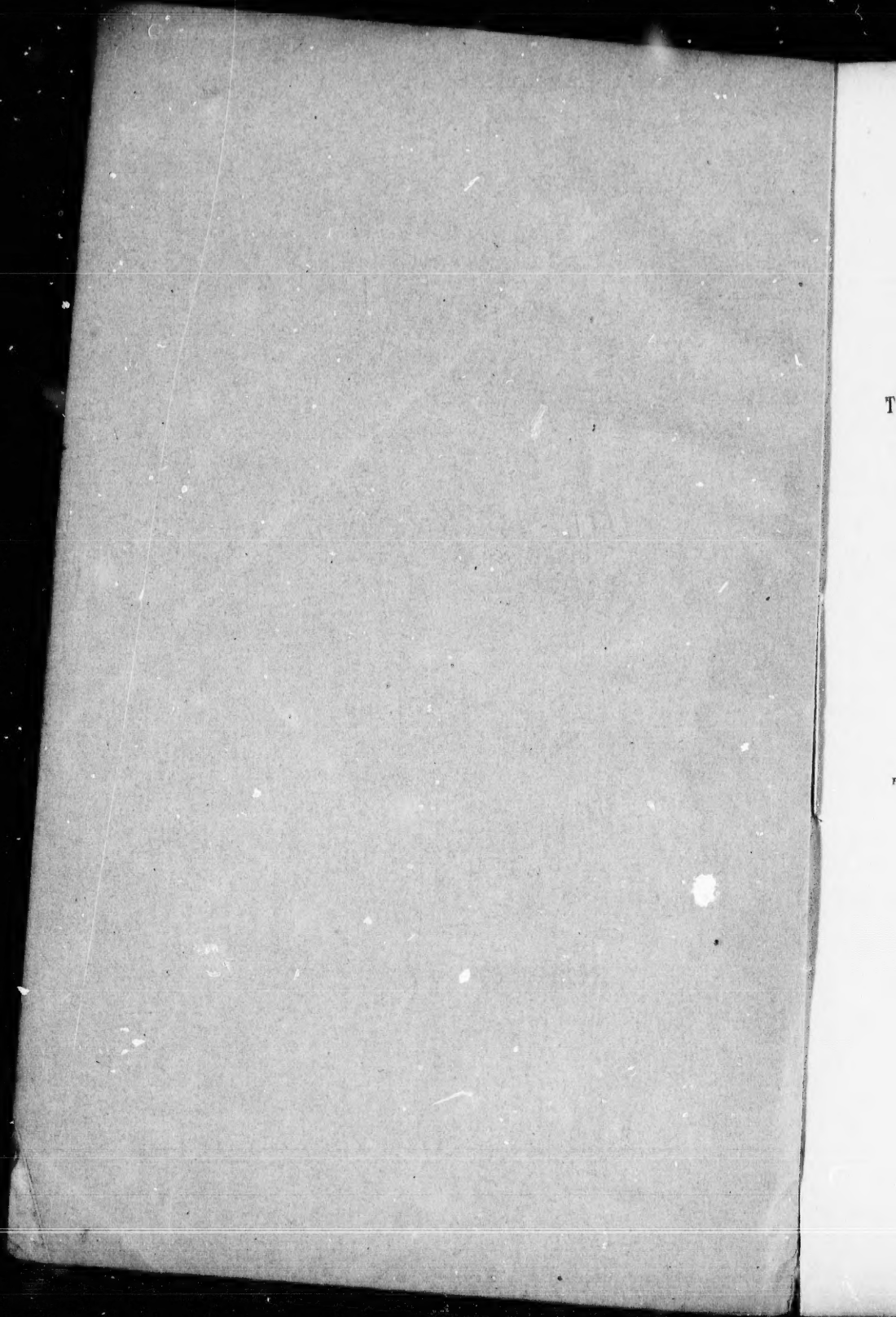
PROFESSOR OF PASTORAL THEOLOGY, AND CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF
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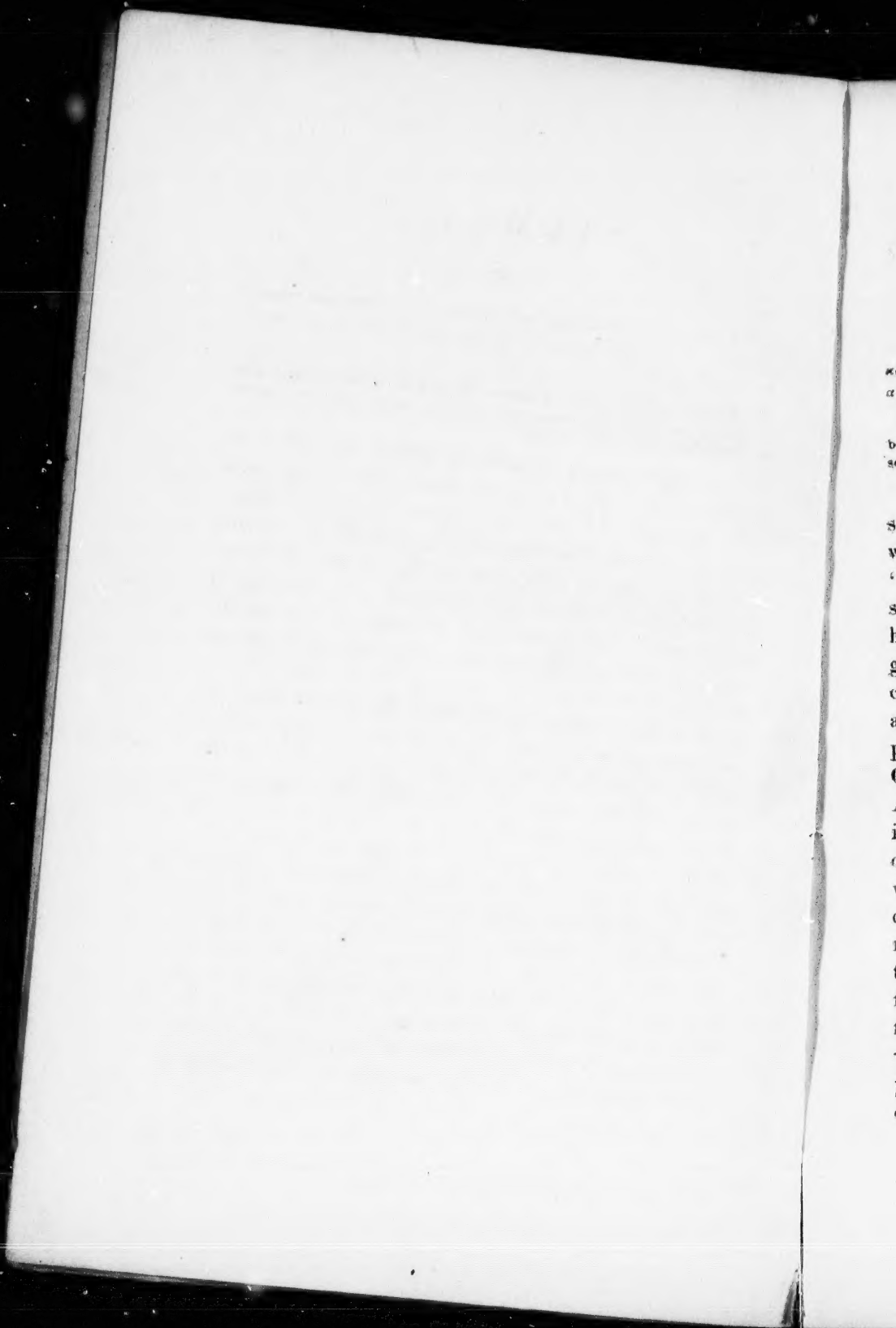
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SERMON.

“Τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου, τοῖς ποιήμασι νοούμενα
καθορᾶται, ἢ τε αἰδὸς αὐτοῦ δυνάμις καὶ Θεότης· εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς
ἀναπολόγητους.”

“For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen,
being understood by the things that are made, EVEN His eternal power and Godhead,
so that they are without excuse.”—ROMANS I. 20.

THE most ancient of inspired authors has left it on sacred record, that “when the foundations of the earth were fastened, and the corner stone thereof was laid,” “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”* The voice of Nature, my brethren, has unceasingly echoed that primæval song; nor has it grown weaker during the lapse of centuries, but, on the contrary, each passing year has added volume to the chorus and harmonious fulness to its tones. There never was a period of time during which the “invisible things” of God were not manifested “in the things that were made.” Alike from the †didactic and ‡experimental teaching of the inspired volume we clearly gather, that from “the creation of the world, the eternal power and Godhead have been written in lines so deep and marked that the dullest vision could behold them, and, that however innate sin and surrounding temptation might lead the corrupt heart of man to reject these evidences of the existence and goodness of the Creator, they were, nevertheless, so palpable, and in their plainness so forcible, that they who despised them were “without excuse.” That man shuts his eyes to the patent exposition of the attributes of the Deity, is no proof of the non-existence of this manifestation. The thunder

* Job. xxxviii. 6, 7. † Rom. i. 20. ‡ Book of Psalms, passim.

rolls, the lightning glares, although the deaf hear not the mighty voice, and the blind see not the dazzling flash. Nor does the fact, as stated by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians, "that the world by wisdom knew not God" in any measure destroy, or even weaken that which he has enunciated in my text,—“that the eternal power and Godhead are understood by the things that are made.” These apparently opposing views are easily capable of reconciliation, and may readily be seen as consonant with the whole revealed economy of God’s dealings with mankind. In perverseness and obstinacy man rejected the testimony,—in forbearance and mercy God increased the proof. When through the combined influence of natural corruption and external evil, man would not see in Nature the reflex of God’s glory, He sent unto them His prophets with direct communication from His throne; but rebellion of heart and frowardness of mind still prevailed, and as man would not read the evidences engraven on the earth, nor hear them uttered from the mighty deep, nor behold them reflected in the boundless firmament of heaven, so too he heeded not the living voice of the Messengers of God. But His mercy knows no bounds, and He who at first “commanded the light to shine out of darkness,” at length gave “the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.”* For ages He was manifested in His works, for centuries in His word, and though “without controversy, great was the mystery of godliness” in these last days, “God was manifested in the flesh,” “*Θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί.*”† If, my Brethren, they who lived anterior to inspired revelation, or in lands unpossessed of its lively oracles, were without excuse, what shall be said of us who have the two-fold witness unceasingly uttering response each to other, the works and the

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

† 1 Tim. iii. 16.

completed word of God? Both proceed from the same Almighty and omniscient author, and while the very fact of God's having imparted His word to mankind proves the proneness of the human heart to reject or pervert the testimony of creation, it teaches us not to seek information from the one unaided by the other, but to act upon the principle expressed in the words of the ¹Natural historian, "that in order rightly to understand the voice of God in Nature we must enter her temple with the Bible in our hands."

The expression in my text "from the creation of the world," or as it is in the original, ²"απο κτισεως κοσμου" probably refers to a point of time, or a determinate date, while the "τοις ποιημασι," or "the things that are made" expressly allude to the works themselves. The full sense of the passage may therefore be, "For His invisible attributes, viz: His eternal power and Godhead have been distinctly perceived by mankind through His material works from the first commencement—the very creation of the world."

As the wonderful works of God are now, so have they ever been, and will remain, the imperishable records of His eternal power and Godhead. * "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handy work, day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." † "O, Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth." ‡ "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in the earth, in the seas, and in all deep places. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth: He maketh lightnings for the rain, He bringeth the wind out of His treasures." Nor was it vouchsafed to the royal minstrel alone to catch a glimpse of the invisible in the things which were made:

* Ps. xix. 42. † Ps. viii. 9. ‡ Ps. cxxxv. 5. 7.

there were others who saw and acknowledged the hand of the Divine Artificer in all above, beneath, around them; in Nature they beheld the presence and the attributes of God, and looked up from it, to the great "I am" the self-existent, "Ens Entium," *ὁ ὢν, ὁ ᾧ καὶ ὁ εἰσρημένος* * "yeh-yeh asher yeh-yeh." In the threefold kingdom, animal, vegetable and mineral, as also in the vast empire of Philosophy, they marked the uniform sway of a sceptre that must needs have been wielded by one hand alone. The great *κοσμος* with its beauty and its order left no room for doubt that it was the result of one mind omniscient, one arm omnipotent, one spirit omnipresent. The heavens with their greater and lesser lights were often the subject of the sacred poetry of Israel's King—the impelling motive to his loftiest strains. The wise and wealthy successor to his throne was not wholly wrapt up in the study of Ethics or in Metaphysical research, but devoted a portion of his time, and his unrivalled talents in tracing the hand of God throughout the vegetable kingdom, noting its impress upon the forest trees and the flowering shrub. In a still wider range he saw as plainly the presence of the great Creator, while he investigated the animal kingdom in its four great departments, for † "he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." That illustrious man of God, the patient Job, drew a lesson from the mineral kingdom, when comparing a knowledge of natural things with that "wisdom which is the excellent gift of God." He knew that ‡ "there was a vein for the silver and a place for the gold where they fine it," but he also knew that there were other impressions of the Creator's presence inscribed upon the adamant rock, on "a path which no

* "I am that I am."—Exod. iii. 14. † 1 Kings iv. 33. ‡ Job xxviii. 1. 7. 10.

fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen." And truly grand, my brethren, is the antithesis—breathing at once a confession of man's finite, and an acknowledgement of God's boundless, vision: "He cutteth out rivers among the rocks, and His eye seeth every precious thing." Thus we have proof from Scripture that the invisible attributes of God may be seen in all created things—that the "eternal power and Godhead are understood by the things that are made."

During the lapse of centuries the Astronomer has increased his knowledge; new facts are evolved each year: fresh proofs of a unity of design elicited, continually adding multiplied testimony to the infinite wisdom and power of Him who preserves intact the wondrous system. With the mathematical certainties of Newton, and the deductions of Chalmers, the mind rises to the conclusion, that He who framed the Universe, and appointed for it perfect laws must be infinite in wisdom, in power and in goodness, and that such a Being is none else than God.

The Natural historian, since the period of Solomon's research, has traversed the wide earth in quest of information, and gathering from every land "the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas," has arranged and classified them with a minuteness so extreme, a precision so accurate, that the comparative anatomist, as he roams amid fossil remains, can assign one solitary bone to its proper place, or even form from it alone the skeleton of the animal to which it belongs. So systematic and so uniform are the principles on which the one all-wise Creator acts.

The Botanist has enlarged his stores of learning, and still advancing, with each new discovery strikes a chord of harmony upon Nature's harp, giving glory to Him who

"created the herb of the field and the trees that are therein."

"The Geologist is rolling off the veil which enveloped long his favourite pursuit, and hid its lessons from sight, and now a voice is being heard, from out the dark recesses of the earth, announcing its origin from God.

Thus, my brethren, each science, and each science in all its branches contributes towards throwing one grand blaze of light upon this mirror, enabling us each year to see more clearly the reflection of "the invisible things of God." Thus too, each individual, by the prosecution and acquirement of some especial subject adapted to the tone and power of his mind, adds a new ray, while the tribute of adoration bursts from the Christian's heart, * "O Lord! how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all, the earth is full of thy riches."

† "To these the sire omnipotent unfolds
The world's harmonious volume, there to read
The transcript of Himself. On every part
They trace the bright impressions of His hand."

True, some few there have been, such as Descartes and Lamarck, who, proud of their intellectual power, and worshipping self for a long series of years, at length supposed the idol capable of grasping infinity, and imagining that they had penetrated to the philosophical cause of all things, in reality placed themselves upon the throne of the Almighty, usurping, if not His prerogative, at least His honour and His praise. While, however, we mourn the perverted talents of a few thus "vain in their own imaginations," if we pass in review before us the great army of Philosophers and men of science, we shall recognize them as a band of champions for the truth, veteran warriors against self-satisfied infidelity and untutored

* Ps. civ. 24. † Akenside.

scepticism :—echoing the sentiments of such leaders as Linnæus who “saw the hand of God in every material object around him,” or Newton who asserted that “it pertained to Natural Philosophy to discover God from phenomena.”⁵

Hence we learn how science may be made subservient to the Gospel precept, “Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” If Nature “day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge;” so a more intimate knowledge of Nature, and a more accurate acquaintance with its laws, will afford still clearer views of the invisible attributes of God. Learning, we know, is not incompatible with the service of God, nor opposed, *per se*, to spirituality of mind, and holiness of heart. The inspired record furnishes us with brief biographical sketches of several individuals renowned as well for eminent piety as for natural wisdom and acquired knowledge. One * “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in words and deeds.” became the leader of an untutored, wayward, rebellious people, who needed no common skill to guide and to control them. Nurtured in the court of the Pharaohs; fostered in infancy with royal care and educated as became the member of a monarch’s household.—the instrument was adapted to the work—and his cultivated mind was employed in the service of his God. Notwithstanding his exalted position, the great lawgiver of Israel was “Moses meek above all men upon the face of the earth”—“Moses † my servant who is faithful in all mine house.” Another ‡ “skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science,” while he managed with consummate ability and dexterity, the affairs of the unwieldy Babylonian empire, neglected not the care of his immortal soul, nor forgot the honour of

* Acts viii. 22. † Num. xii. 3. ‡ Dan. i. 4.

his God, but was fervent in spirit, as he was diligent in business, serving the Lord—* “kneeling upon his knees three times a day,” “praying, and making supplication before his God.”⁶ Need I remind you of the man taught at Gamaliel’s feet, whose profound thought and cogent reasoning in every sentence of his unparalleled writings bespeak the mind severely, sternly disciplined. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit of God, he proclaimed truths that were only imparted by that Sacred Teacher, but as he did so, and announced the great message of salvation to his fellow-men, he despised not the poetry of †Aratus, nor the irony of †Epimenides.⁷ His unquestioned talents, his acknowledged learning clashed not with his heavenly mindedness, but were enlisted in the cause of Christ. Did the brilliant powers and accumulated information of these renowned servants of the Lord, lessen or interfere with their devotedness to Him? No. With brighter, as with purer, lustre they shone in every position of life: true religion was blended and interwoven with their secular pursuits, lending colour and majesty to all they either said or did.

To these eminent men, had been vouchsafed the word of God; to St. Paul, indeed, a still fuller manifestation than to Moses and Daniel, for the word had been made flesh, and §tabernacled amongst men, || “In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,”—** “in Him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” even in Him †† “who was the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of His person.” ‡‡ “God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Thus God who revealed

⁶ Dan. vi. 10, 11. † Acts xvii. 28. ‡ Ep. to Titus, i. 12. § σκηνοώσας. || Col. ii. 9.
^{**} Col. ii. 3. †† Heb. i. 3. ‡‡ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

Himself in His works, and in His word, * "hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." In Him we behold that attribute, in which the Father so † delights, shining as the noon day sun, and which so warmed the heart of him who leaned on Jesus' breast, that he exclaimed in the fulness of his feeling, ‡ "God is love." Truly, through all the works of His hand, this constituent element may be traced—in every department of creation it may be seen, but in the sacrifice of His well-beloved son it beams forth in unclouded glory. To the cross on Calvary, the weeping sinner turns and sees that in an incarnate God which at once gives him confidence to draw nigh and seek His pardon and His grace. While he trembles at the boundless power of Him who § "thunders in the heavens," || "shoots out lightnings," and ** "measures the waters in the hollow of His hand," he beholds in Jesus the manifestation of a love which draws him to His side. There he gains knowledge that †† "maketh wise unto salvation," for looking with the eye of faith upon ††† "the word of life," the assertion of the Apostle is realised—"Christ is made unto Him wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." Were we called upon, my brethren, to make choice between this knowledge, revealed to us in the pages of God's holy word, and the accumulated learning of the world, one sentence of inspiration is worth infinitely more than the aggregate of scientific labours,—of greater value than the joint libraries on earth. §§ "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," when placed in the scale is more than a counter-balance for the combined researches of Philosophy, and the countless triumphs of genius. Such demand, however, is not made upon us; we are not required, in embracing the one to reject the other,

* Heb. i. 2. † Micah, vii. 18. ‡ 1 John, iv. 8. § Ps. xviii. 13. || Ps. xvii. 14.
** Isaiah, xl. 12. †† 2 Tim. iii. 15. ††† 1 Jno. i. 1. §§ 1 Tim. i. 15.

but, blessed with a clear revelation, from God, to carry it with us into the field of Nature, and through its medium behold His wondrous works.

It is then, my brethren, members of the University, not with satisfaction alone, but with gratitude to the Most High, that we look upon our seat of learning. To the cry which lately has been ringing throughout the world we have turned a deaf ear, and so far from disconnecting religious from secular instruction, we have endeavoured to blend them still more closely together, and, with the blessing of God, shall continue so to do, until the wise man's proverb is felt and acknowledged to be the truth, that ^s "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." In beholding Him, then, who is invisible in those "things that are made," we treat the important matter not objectively alone, but subjectively also. For while the Astronomer leads the mind to the wonderful systems around us, measures the distance from star to star, or weighs the atmosphere of the planets; while the Natural Historian and the Chemist point out the various laws of Nature, acting with unerring regularity; there are others entrusted by you with the solemn duty of leading those committed to their charge to the fountain of inspired truth, and of urging them to seek the Holy Spirit's help and teaching, that they may * "acquaint themselves with God, and be at peace."

It would ill become my responsible position this day to permit the opportunity to pass unimproved of urging you with a christian's warmth and zeal, to search faithfully your own hearts, and see if you be at peace with God. If you are not,—living in Gospel days,—look to Jesus, and acquaint yourselves with God, through Him; for † "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

* Job. xxii. 21. † Rom. v. 1.

If you know God, and are known of Him, let your journey through this world be gladdened and improved by beholding His eternal power and Godhead on every side of your heavenward path, ever feeling the presence of Jesus, "Immanuel"—"God with us," in each advancing step of your pilgrimage, and echoing the sentiment so sweetly sung by the Christian bard.†

"When round thy wondrous below,
My searching rapturous glance I throw,
Tracing out wisdom, power and love
In earth or sky, by stream or grove;
Let not my heart within me burn,
Except in all I thee discern!"

Now unto God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, praise and glory, world without end. Amen.

† Keble's Evening Hymn.



NOTES.

(1) Heinrich Moritz Gaede, Professor of Natural History in the University of Liege.

(2) A creatura mundi (objective) h. e. ex operibus creatis, ex ipsa mundi fabrica (Chrys.) Non placet: 1 Quia id denotat vox sequens, ποιηματα. 2. Tunc non dixisset απο, sed εχ. Al. jam inde a creatione mundi, i. e. post mundum creatum. απο hic non materiam subjectam notat; cui εχ inservit; sed tempus, temporis antiquitatem, vel durationis initium, ab initio humani generis. Sic απο sumitur Matt. xiii. 35, and xxii. 35. Luke xl. 50. Sic sumitur, απ'αρχης κτισεως Marc. x. 6, and xiii. 19. 2 Pet. iii. 4. Sic, απο καταβολης κοσμου Matt. xiii. 35, and xxv. 34. Vel, a fundamentis mundi κτισις et creationem significat et creaturam. Pooles Synopsis, Vol. v.

(3) Nomen sacrosanctum ab hawyaw, fuit, derivatum. Judaeis erat αρχε ποιητων, a solo Sacerdote, semel in anno ingredientie το αγιον αγιον, enunciabile; cujus prima syllaba iod signum est futuri temporis, secunda ho praesentis, ultima aw praeteriti; et significat ο ων ο ην και ο εσομενος. Heb. Gram. Rud. in usum. Westmonasteriensis.

(4) A comparison of the celebrated "Bridgewater Treatises" with more modern scientific words, will give the strongest proof of the astonishing progress of knowledge even since their publication, as well as its subserviency to revelation.

(5) De systemate mundi. The full force of the expression is, (as may be gathered from the context) that it is the very office and business of Nat. Phil. to search out and find God from Phenomena.

(6) I would refer the reader to "Prideaux's connexion of profane and sacred History" for a very interesting account of Daniel's political position and labours, and a beautiful delineation of his character.

(7) Of the many accounts of St. Paul's labours, and sketches of his character, perhaps, the most concise and interesting is that which may be found in "Horne's Introduction." To ensure its being read and prized by the undergraduates of the University and, indeed, all students of scripture, it needs only to be commenced. Those who begin will be almost sure to finish.

(8) It is remarkable that this is the very first proverb of Solomon—the six preceding verses are only an introduction or preface to the book.